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THE TRUE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL.

The word democracy, which once aroused scorn, then homage, seems now to evoke despair: This is partly a matter of evolution; but partly also a matter of definition. No two generations, no two individuals, have meant quite the same thing by Democracy. I wish at present to ask what Democracy can be fairly taken to stand for in the world of the ideal? This is conceivably something other than the suffrage, than political institutions, economic fallacies; something other than motive, though perhaps involved in motive; something in part expressed by the changes of the last hundred years, in part resulting from them. Can it be defined?

A generation ago men would have answered the question by some glowing eulogy of Liberty. They might have vouched to warranty that great Hellenic philosopher who finds in Freedom at once the peril and chiefest glory of the democratic state. "Even the horses and asses have a way of marching along with all the rights and dignities of freemen; and they will run at anybody who comes in their way if he does not leave the road clear for them; and all things are just ready to burst with liberty."¹ We have changed all that. Liberty is neither the glory nor the peril of modern democracies. If anywhere, one would have looked to England for a fulfilment of Platonic prophecy. The Englishman is an individualist; his reserve,

¹ "The Republic." Translation by Jowett, p. 563.
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his sense of completeness unto himself, and his exceeding anxiety to do as he pleases, give distinction to his character. Yet in England to-day we find a growing distrust of Liberty and a multiplication of the rules which restrict it. "In our own day," writes Lecky, "no fact is more incontestable and conspicuous than the love of Democracy for authoritative regulation."² While some are proclaiming that the supreme blessing of freedom has been to teach us its limitations, others mourn that speech is no longer free and that men's hearts are no longer open to the appeal of oppressed nationalities. Others, again, profess the forms of freedom after the fashion of the man at an Australian bush inn who knocked down a comrade for suggesting that something might be said for the Boers, shook a fist in his face, and then bade him thank God that he lived in a country where there was freedom of speech. "Sympathy, which a generation ago was taking the shape of justice," laments Herbert Spencer with perhaps exaggerated emphasis, "is relapsing into the shape of generosity; and the generosity is exercised by inflicting injustice. Daily legislation betrays little anxiety that a man shall have what belongs to him, but great anxiety that he shall have what belongs to somebody else."³

If indeed we except a few philosophers who are out of touch with social tendencies, and the individuals in whom the prejudices of self-interest beget an economic and political liberalism, the whole tendency of modern feeling is towards the conviction that the Liberty which our forefathers praised has done its chief work. Men no longer regard it with special affection, or hope for salvation from the free play of individual interests. They are far too impressed by the way in which facilities for amassing immense fortunes have outgrown the restrictions of democratic legislatures. They have little fear of the tyranny of their rulers, but great fear of the exploitation of the plutocrat; and they conceive of the pursuit of liberty as perhaps leading to nothing better than "the desolate freedom of the wild ass." I am not concerned with the truth of such views: I sim-

² "Democracy and Liberty," I. 213.

³ "Ethics" II. 44.

ply note them as material for the consideration of those who would understand the true nature of the ideal towards which democracies tend, working out their destiny not in Utopia but on earth, not in times simple and stationary but in times complex and progressive, not untrammelled and unperplexed but encumbered by the changing problems and difficulties of modern civilized life.

Does the rejection of Liberty imply the elevation of equality? Much contradiction exists on this point. While many speak of equality as the master passion of Democracy, others declare that in no other community is the desire for social stratification so universal or so strong. The facts of life in Australia tend to discountenance both of these views as extreme. Whilst on the one hand a few members of the Labor class advocate equality in all conceivable forms, and on the other hand certain members of the professional classes appear to be incapable of any other judgment of men than that which is based on their standing at Government House, the great mass of the population lie between these extremes. While making no fetish of equality in any sense, they show a disposition to assume *camaraderie* between class and class. A late Bishop of Melbourne was counselled on one occasion not to be shy of approaching a cricketer who was the most popular guest of the evening. "He won't mind. He's the right sort." The Bishop took his lesson, and acted upon it, conquered—doubtless—by a conviction of the gains of a social atmosphere where a man stands or falls by what he can do. No one can remain long in Australia without feeling that the Australian citizen is relatively free from those peculiar vices of manners, the insolence and servility, which result from class isolation.

One hears much in Europe of the pursuit of titles and decorations in America. The truth appears to be that, in so far as we must impute to this pursuit a desire for rank and social precedence, its extent is much exaggerated and its relation to the national life misunderstood. I have not, however, seen enough of America to speak on the point with confidence, and I content myself with quoting the word of a distinguished authority:—

"The second charm of American Life," writes Bryce, "is one which some Europeans will smile at. It is social Equality. To many Europeans—to Germans, let us say, or Englishmen—the word has an odious sound. It suggests a dirty fellow in a blouse elbowing his betters in a crowd, or an ill-conditioned villager shaking his fist at the parson and the squire; or, at any rate, it suggests obtrusiveness and bad manners. The exact contrary is the truth. Equality improves manners, for it strengthens the basis of all good manners, respect for other men and women, simply as men and women, irrespective of their station in life. . . . People meet on a simple and natural footing, with more frankness and ease than is possible in countries where every one is either looking up or looking down. There is no servility on the part of the humbler, and if now and then a little of the 'I am as good as you' rudeness be perceptible, it is almost sure to proceed from a recent immigrant, to whom the attitude of simple Equality has not yet become familiar as the evidently proper attitude of one man to another. There is no condescension on the part of the more highly placed, nor is there even that sort of scrupulously polite coldness which one might think they would adopt in order to protect their dignity."⁴

In France, an enthusiasm for Equality exists, but it is more restrained by the power of the past. "The French lawyer," observes Bodley, "will challenge a Count without hesitation, while he will scorn to concede a rendezvous to a cabman." Of the Legion of Honor, he writes:

"From the egalitarian point of view, the disadvantage of the system is that it tends to make the French a nation of suppliants, each man soliciting to have confirmed his superiority over his neighbor. Twice annually, at the New Year, and on the day of the Fall of the Bastile, supreme festival of Equality, the new nominations and promotions are published, being the result of many months' importuning of ministers. So vast is the host of applicants that two other species of decorations have had to be developed or invented outside the national Order. . . . Thus, whenever the President of the Republic visits officially a provincial town, he goes with the definite mission of displaying that Equality is discountenanced by the State; for it is his practice to seize the occasion to distinguish local notables with invidious disparity. The worthiest in the eyes of the Government he invests with the Legion of Honor; while other inhabitants of mark he practically tells that they are of inferior condition, not good enough for the red ribbon, and only entitled to the modest violet of the Academy, or the rustic green of Agriculture."⁵

This appreciation of French life by an English author recalls the fact that quite recently a French publicist of repute has published a work on the Psychology of the Anglo-Saxon.

⁴ "The American Commonwealth," II. 810.

⁵ Bodley's "France," I. 164-5.

"Inequalities are established in England," argues in effect Emile Boutmy, "as the result of the severity of the struggle for existence. Once established, the citizen regards them with complacency for several reasons. (1) Their existence does not prevent him from realizing his ruling ambition *to do something*. (2) He is too conservative in disposition and habits to desire much change in his social environment. (3) More disposed to act than to think or reflect, his analysis of the elements of the national life is arrested half way, so that Society appears to him nothing more than an aggregate of classes and corporations. His intellectual deficiencies prevent him from reaching a conception of society as made up of individuals between each of whom in the last analysis Equality must be assumed as a working basis."⁶

Most Englishmen will accept this judgment as sound in substance. Envy of all superiority is not unknown among us; but it is not common. Superiority and inferiority are rather accepted as more or less inscrutable facts. In new lands, free from the despotism of old institutions, the Englishman will accept and appreciate a large measure of equality in his social relations. At home, he does not appear to desire Equality in any form. To make of it the sole or paramount element in his social ideal would exact a generous allowance for its demerits. The Englishman will not do justice to its merits. Conscious that men are neither born equal nor by any legerdemain can be made equal, he accepts inequality in all its forms as a part of the order of Nature.

We have seen that Equality in certain special forms is sometimes accepted or sought after by modern democracies. But nowhere is it revered. One very patent reason for this may be found in the negative character of Equality. There is no special charm or advantage in having all men equal if it be an equality of badness—the equality of a lunatic asylum or a seasick crew. If, on the other hand, we are to suppose an equality of goodness, it is the goodness and not the Equality upon which moral enthusiasm must fasten; but as conditional to something beyond. Great national or political faiths are constructive. Equality, negative rather than positive, destructive rather than constructive, may pull down the wrong; it cannot uphold the right. It may lead battalions to victory; it cannot control what it wins. Its permanent influence must depend

⁶ Boutmy "Psychologie politique du Peuple anglais," pp. 188-197, 268-270.

upon its subordination to other enthusiasms. It is sure to find some place in the democratic policy; it cannot for long inspire the thought and activities of the democratic citizen.

If to-day men's hearts are not fired by the thought of Liberty or Equality, if these aspirations can no longer claim to express the genius and inspiration of the democratic ideal, whither does that ideal tend? Towards extinction? We cannot hope to answer this question unless we have the courage to free our minds from certain conventional misjudgments of Democracy which have had their origin in exaggerated expectation or partial analysis. We must avoid the excesses of those who are disappointed with Democracy because they have hoped too much of it, and of those who refuse to make allowance for the problems with which modern politics have had to cope.

In the first place, the common estimation of Democracy has suffered from a reaction against a too sanguine expectation. The apostles of modern Democracy, like the apostles of a former time, antedated the millenium. Democracy, defined as government by the people, was to have been realized by granting the suffrage. Opportunity was to inspire; exercise to perfect. But the dream has not been realized. Neither in Europe nor in America do the people rule. Neither in Europe nor in America have the people seriously endeavoured to answer to the demands which new institutions have made upon them. Opportunity to rule has not inspired an ambition to be worthy of rule; and the exercise of political control by the many has been capricious, intermittent, and ineffectual. Great commercial interests have thwarted political aspiration, and in the presence of a general inertia the enthusiasm of the democrat has yielded to the chill of despair. I wish to point out that such despair may be as little justified as the exaggerated expectations of democratic pioneers. If those expectations have been falsified, the fact affords no reason for rushing to an opposite extreme and condemning Democracy on the evidence of a generation. Human possibilities are not to be actualized in the course of a few decades; and it is now made abundantly clear that Democracy must continue to rest its hope on potentialities rather than actualities, building more upon the race than upon

individuals or a generation of individuals, with respect to whom it must proclaim the need for an infinite patience which will sympathize with man's weak strivings and even with his failure to strive. The element in the democratic gospel is exacting; it cannot as yet be held ridiculous. Time alone can judge its truth.

In the second place, Democracy has been misjudged because we have not realized the extent of the difficulties which it has been called upon to overcome. Scientific and mechanical progress, by increasing the facilities for making great fortunes, has lured the souls of men in the pursuit of gain. The growing complexity of affairs, and the swift development of urban populations, have increased the number and difficulty of our political problems to an unprecedented extent. The competition of the nations for world dominion, due to the opening up of new continents, is imposing a great strain upon national finance, and threatening the world with some of the gravest moral evils of chronic militancy. Democratic progress is not responsible for these things; but democratic institutions have to cope with them.⁷ We must remember this fact, if we would judge Democracy aright or discover the real character of its ideal.

The nature of that ideal must be sought in the achievements of Democracy rather than its mistakes, in what it has done rather than what it has failed to do. I fear that in the past most of us have been so disappointed with the failures of government *by* the people, that we have failed to be just to the progress which has been made in the direction of government *for* the people. While the capacity of the many for self-government still remains to be proved, the appreciation by all classes of the claims of the many as the proper object of government has grown stronger and stronger. To this fact must be added an undoubted progress in man's appreciation of Humanity. How else shall we explain the anomaly that the Age in which Christians have begun to doubt the eternal damnation of the heathen is also the Age of Foreign Missions? Whatever may happen to democratic institutions in the future,

⁷ In my essay "The New Democracy," this subject is considered at some length in the chapter, "The Real Defects of Democracy."

the results which have been achieved in these directions have permanently enriched the world. We may examine them a little more closely.

I speak of *a deeper appreciation of Humanity*. The idea of Humanity is no creation of Democracy. The origin of that idea takes us back to tribal times when Revenge was potent and mutual protection from foes was the great motive of social union. To trace the stages of its slow development, we need to review the rise and fall of Oriental despotisms, the social and religious systems of the East, and the culture of that Hellenic world where great philosophers extolled "the pure and heartfelt hatred of the foreigner" while developing an Art and Knowledge which was destined to unite humanity under the Empire of Ideas. From Greek culture we should have to pass to Roman Jurisprudence, the *Pax Romana*, and the organization of the Mediterranean world under the Empire of Law. When we had gone thus far, we should only be at the beginning of our work, for we should still have to regard the advent of the Teuton, the triumphs of Christianity, the mediaeval theory of a universal state, the decline of slavery, the stages of industrial progress, the intellectual renaissance of the fifteenth century, the spiritual renaissance of the sixteenth century, the struggles for liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the growth of federations and democracies in our own time. Even now, alas, the Idea of Humanity is but indifferently appreciated. Religion, Art, and Poetry may have inspired man. The voice of the great and good may have proclaimed the worth of man. But these influences have not always been in harmony with themselves or with one another, and the possibilities of the seed have been limited by deficiencies in the soil. Great barriers still divide men. Yet, much has been done; and to-day the barrier of caste is being undermined by the power of Democracy. Just as the struggles of the seventeenth and preceding centuries were engaged in winning back the old Teutonic freedom, reconciling it with higher social and political conditions, so in our time Democracy has sought to realize on a vast scale something of that spirit of mutual responsibility which marked the fellowship unit of

tribal times. Democracy is indeed less than Humanity; but its face is towards Humanity; and its presence among us has broadened the common vision until the Idea of Humanity, once imputed with scorn to solitary dreamers, has become the possession of multitudes.

I speak also of *a broader conception of social justice*. Each age of moral progress has seen some advance in the intrusion of the domain of justice upon the domain of charity; has witnessed the recognition by the human conscience of obligations which before had been denied or admitted as merely supererogatory. Hence, by slow degrees, justice, which is declared to have originated in the impulse to give your enemy as severe a blow as he has given you, has been broadened until to-day it embraces within its wide domain the claims of poverty and weakness. Aforetime these appealed to our charity; they now appeal to our sense of justice. The relation of Democracy to this process is too apparent to call for emphasis. Democrats may quarrel about the consequences of the ethical principles which underlie the suffrage, or may differ as to the period for their practical application; but the general character of those principles is beyond the range of controversy. They may be stated as the right of every individual to self-realization and to a share in working out the national destiny; the right of every individual to count as one (no man counting as more than one) in all estimations of the common good; and, implied in these, transcending them in its supreme import, the duty of each to revere in others the claims which he makes for himself.

I said just now that we must examine the achievements of Democracy rather than its failures if we would learn its ideal. The conclusions which such an examination must suggest to us are confirmed by the teaching of those who have a special claim to represent the democratic movement. I speak not of demagogues who exploit that movement for their own purposes, seeking to gain a popular favor by the arts of flattery and intrigue, but of those who have loved Democracy, have served or died for it. The meaning of Democracy must be sought in the lives of its best men. And if we are to apply this test, surely no higher or better representative could be found

than Mazzini. There is a remarkable passage in "Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe" which bears directly upon the subject of inquiry:

"The law of God has not two weights and two measures: Christ came for all: He spoke to all: He died for all. . . . We cannot wish the brow that is raised to Heaven to fall prostrate in the dust before any created being: the soul that should aspire to Heaven, to rot in ignorance of its rights, its powers, and its noble origin, while on earth. We cannot admit that instead of loving one another like brethren, men ought to be divided, hostile, selfish: jealous, city of city, nation of nation. We protest, then, against all inequality, against all oppression wheresoever it is practiced: for we acknowledge no foreigners: we recognize only the just and the unjust: the friends and the enemies of the law of God. This forms the essence of what men have agreed to call the *Democratic Movement*; and if anything ever profoundly surprised me, it is that so many persons have hitherto been blind to the eminently religious character of that movement, which is sooner or later destined to be recognized."

Mazzini prized Liberty; but he saw clearly that Democracy could not rest at that stage; that, transcending Liberty and Equality, it must pass on to something beyond, or perish miserably. That "something beyond" may seem to us visionary. But it can be recognized, without adulation or censure, as material for reflection. Its presence can be traced in much of the better art of our time. Witness, for an example, the art of Millet with its deep reverence for elemental human life and human toil. Witness, especially, his tragic picture called "The Man with the Hoe." The scene represents a man occupied in field work. The man pauses in his work, and looks into space with a wearied and vacant gaze. He has lived a life in which all the finer aspirations have been dwarfed by the struggle for existence.

"Bowed by the weight of centuries, he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Solid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?
Is this the thing the Lord God made, and gave,

To have dominion over sea and land?
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of eternity?
Is this the dream he dreamed who shaped the suns
And pillared the blue firmament with light?
Down all the stretch of hell to its last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this—
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed—
More filled with signs and portents for the soul—
More fraught with menace to the universe.
What gulf's between him and the seraphim?
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?
What are the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity, betrayed,
Cries protest to the judges of the world.”^a

The work of Millet gives expression to a spirit which slowly invades all branches of art. Even if our flights in literature never take us higher than the passing novel, we can hardly fail to be impressed by a real change in the artist's view of life. Gradually the people, the life they live, the thought that stirs within them, their hopes, joys, and sufferings are being deemed worthy subjects of highest art—no longer to receive the insincere treatment of the artist who selects and handles his materials with a constant regard to the fastidious sense, but to be welcomed as inherently noble to him who has the soul to interpret. The tendency is described with admirable force in J. A. Symonds' *Essay on Walt Whitman*.

“Heroism steps forth from the tent of Achilles; chivalry descends from the arm-gaunt charger of the knight; loyalty is seen to be no mere devotion to a dynasty. None of these high virtues are lost to us. On the contrary, we find them everywhere. They are brought within reach, instead of being relegated to some remote region in the past, or deemed the special property of privileged classes. The engine-driver steering his train at night over perilous viaducts, the life-boat man, the member of the fire-brigade assailing houses toppling to their ruin among flames; these are found to be no less heroic than Theseus grappling the Minotaur in Cretan labyrinths. And so it is with the chivalrous respect for womanhood and weakness, with loyal self-dedication to a principle or cause, with comrade-

^a Edwin Markham.

ship uniting men in brotherhood, with passion fit for tragedy, with beauty shedding light from heaven on human habitations. They were thought to dwell far off in antique fable or dim mediaeval legend. They appeared to our fancy clad in glittering armor, plumed, and spurred, surrounded with the aureole of noble birth. We now behold them at our house-doors, in the streets and fields around us. . . . This extended recognition of the noble and the lovely qualities in human life, the qualities upon which pure art must seize, is due partially to what we call Democracy. But it implies something more than that word is commonly supposed to denote—a new and more deeply religious way of looking at mankind, a gradual triumph after so many centuries of the spirit which is Christ's, an enlarged faculty for piercing below externals and appearances to the truth and essence of things. God, the divine, is recognized as immanent in nature, and in the soul and body of humanity; not external to these things, not conceived of as creative from outside, or as incarnated in any single personage, but all-pervasive, all-constitutive, everywhere and in all. That is the democratic philosophy.”⁹

The true character of the democratic ideal is thus revealed. It once stood for Liberty or Equality. It now stands for what perhaps may be described as Brotherhood. Among all the strange contradictions of our day surely there is none more strange than this—that when Belief as a whole has seemed to wither, and life has become in many ways more materialized, there should have developed a new and very exalted social ideal. We may regard the presence of this ideal as the first sign of a new dawn that shall arise upon the mountains. We may regard it as the last brilliant reflections of a sun which has already set. We cannot contemplate it without some enthusiasm: we cannot help feeling that such enthusiasm might easily become irrational and extreme. The post of honor is the post of danger; the political institutions which aim the highest may fail the most miserably. The more we see of Democracy, the more closely we examine it, the more we must be impressed by the ancient declaration that Republics live by virtue. A modern State which voluntarily adopts Democracy, makes a declaration of resolve to live the higher life. If it fails to keep this resolve, the step forwards must lead to the rigors or Despotism, or the desolation of Anarchy. The Puritan fought to realize God's Kingdom on Earth. His creed was

⁹ “Essays Speculative and Suggestive,” pp. 263-4.

narrow, but it was also high; "a rapture too severe for weak mortality"; and the nation rebelled against it, as much because it was high as because it was narrow. The puritan had undertaken too great a task. Has Democracy undertaken too great a task? Have we tried too early in the world's history to realize the political institution based on mutual forbearance and co-operation? If this be the case we may imagine some historian of a remote future concluding his account of the present age in the following mournful judgment: "In a word, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the development of Democracy, but not the development of that moral atmosphere which could alone make Democracy a real and lasting triumph. At one time it seemed as if that moral atmosphere was almost within reach, but the evidences which suggested this hope were proved to be inadequate. Hence, Democracy, which had promised to inaugurate a new era in the history of man, an era of Brotherhood, became more and more discredited; and humanity started out once again on a cycle of experience, finding what strength it could in the hope that in some far future, man might reach the higher levels which as yet had been sought in vain."

Judicious observers are not wanting to-day who will tell us that the world's need is not Fraternity, but justice and discipline; that the operation of natural laws in their influences upon human progress will ensure the triumph of societies in which competition is most free and men are least fettered by the survival of the unfit. To such warnings must be added the sombre fact that an analysis of existing social life reveals a vast gulf to-day between aspiration and actuality. Clearly it is not the presence of an ideal in a nation that saves, but the fearless strong-hearted devotion to an ideal. Civilizations, says one, are destroyed by great ideas apprehended, but not lived up to. Rome, as we know, was passing slowly, surely, to its fall during the long period which was distinguished from its predecessors by an increased humanity. To-day we have ideals, but the common acceptation of them can only be made efficacious by embracing the call to labor and to suffer in a

way that is seldom realized. We have chosen a God to worship without knowing how jealous He would be, or how exacting of the spirit which consecrates institutions to high purposes. Whether the ultimate results will be good or evil, the future alone can decide.

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RELATIVITY AND FINALITY IN ETHICS.

The moral teacher constantly faces a strong and persistent craving on the part of persons of all classes and of every range of intelligence for some final and absolute authority in the field of conduct. Even where in concrete cases such persons do not easily surrender their own judgments, yet in the abstract they demand the feeling that in the background there are sharply defined laws, and final and authoritative voices to insure them in time of need against errors and mistakes amidst the moral difficulties all vividly anticipate as our possible lot.

Nor is it a sufficient reason for this longing to emphasize the grave issues which are, no doubt, at stake. It is not simply as the sick man demands expert medical aid. What is demanded is not competent advice, but an abstract infallibility somewhere. The ethically confused man seeks advice, but advice is not what the average man longs for; he hungers for abstract infallibility behind the advice. The opportunity for medical quackery is small compared to the field for ethical quackery.

The sense that our moral decisions must be made rapidly, almost instinctively; that in many cases to hesitate is to be lost; may make the longing for a final and sure guide strong, but it does not explain the soul's demand for this abstract infallibility. We all at times become weary in the midst of the